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By Terry Lewis
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A headstone dedication is the final chapter in the life of the only woman ever electrocuted by the state.

CUTHBERT, GA — In February of 1945, Lena Baker was executed in Georgia's electric chair, becoming the only woman in the state ever to die in "Old Sparky."

On Wednesday at the Mt. Vernon Baptist Church Cemetery where Baker is buried, a new headstone was dedicated in her honor, capping a 10-year quest by family and friends to clear her name.

"When we first started this campaign 10 years ago, there were only five or 10 people with us," Baker's nephew Roosevelt Curry said at the dedication ceremony. "Now look at all these people here. But when we started, I said ain't nobody gonna stop us from getting justice for Lena Baker."

Baker, an African-American maid, killed her employer, Elliott Knight, a local gristmill owner, in 1944. At her trial she claimed that Knight had imprisoned and threatened to shoot her should she attempt to leave.

She took his gun and shot him.

Baker was convicted of capital murder by a jury of 12 white men and executed less than six months later.

A clemency campaign, led by Curry, was a grueling process that finally came to fruition after the Georgia Pardon and Parole Board ruled that a "grievous error" occurred when she was denied clemency following her trial.

Her supporters maintained the charge against her should have been reduced from capital murder to manslaughter. They insisted Knight's death was accidental.

Baker was granted a full and unconditional pardon by the state of Georgia in 2005, 60 years after her execution.

Jamey Crozier, an aid to U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop Jr., D-Albany, read a statement to the gathering which he said the congressman would be reading into the Congressional Record later in the afternoon.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Lena Baker," Crozier read. "Today, her family dedicates her tombstone, 65 years after she was laid to rest at the Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Cuthbert, Ga."

Bishop ended the resolution by writing, "Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that the dedication of her tombstone today can heal the wounds of the past. May Lena Baker now truly rest in peace."

The monument dedication coincided with the release earlier this week of the "The Lena Baker Story," a feature-length docudrama on DVD produced by Barnholz Entertainment and

distributed by Lionsgate Films.

The film was written, produced and directed by Ralph Wilcox.

"There are plenty of tragedies out there that no one has ever heard of," Wilcox said during the dedication. "This was one of them. We did not make this film to create divisiveness between black and white folks. Lena's story is still relevant today. I hope that people don't look at this film as strictly a black and white issue, but we need not forget where we've been, lest we repeat the past.

"I want people to regard this film as a story of a woman's life. As filmmakers, our job is not only to entertain but also to enlighten and educate. And even though Lena was flawed, this film is an opportunity to give her the voice she was denied 64 years ago.

"Each and every one of us deserves that."